

HEALTH MATTERS

FITNESS VIEW

BY BONNIE KAYE

Edible Flower Power

You know the old saying, life is short, so take time to stop and eat the flowers! That's what fitness-minded and holistic Chef Jeff McGinnis might say—sure you can still smell them, but then sauté them in a nice sauce and plate 'em up—edible flowers are IN this summer as a fresh way to lighten and brighten up any dish as a garnish, or even as a main course.

"You have something fun, something natural and something healthy," explains Chef Jeff, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, surfer who reminds me of a young Owen Wilson, (but without the nose) who specializes in organic, healthy cuisine to support his fit lifestyle. Today it is a picture-perfect sunny day at the beachside Dilido Café at The Ritz Carlton South Beach Hotel where he is showing me how to make a mostly melon and flower salad; but the flowers are not for show, they are for eating.

"I've got five different melons in here, I've got one I imported from Tuscany and we've got a lot of organic tomatoes in here. I used a lot of flowers in this dish, that's actually the lettuce instead of the average lettuce, and what a lot of people don't know about flowers is that flowers are actually are an incredible source of vitamins, minerals."

I was surprised to learn from Chef Jeff that flowers are also a source of protein, contained in the pollen, within the nectar of the flower. Jeff continued to convince me that having flowers for lunch was a nutritious, delicious idea.

"The nectar from these flowers has all kind of stuff that is good for you. Not only that but it is a little bit sweet, so these flowers have flavor."

Hmmm. I hadn't heard this before, but he had such

a great smile and said it with such conviction he could have told me tree bark was the new "IT"

topping and I would have tried it. In my salad were several flowers, including dandelions and calendula petals, which Jeff had somehow put inside a see-through tomato geelee mold. I guessed in the same way I put bananas in my strawberry Jell-O mold, only it was a much prettier presentation. I think it's safe to say you won't be seeing me on

TOP CHEF

anytime soon, although

I must say, my cherry-flavored Kool-Aid ice cubes with toothpicks are quite refreshing on a hot summer's day!

I later found out the calendula petals can be used healing herbs for wounds and for making cream, but I didn't actually taste the calendula or the dandelions. I decided to hold out for the two most colorful flowers popping out on my plate—first, the bright orange,



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festive-looking nasturtium.

"Nasturtiums are loaded with vitamin C and vitamin A...very good for you." Jeff proclaimed enthusiastically, as I hesitantly bit into the pretty flower—it tasted pleasantly peppery. He then held up an exquisite flower with a very distinctive shape and a vibrant, royal blue and purplish color...not quite like any color I'd seen a crayon box before. It looked almost too beautiful to eat, like it really belonged in a vase, not on a plate—but I took a tiny nibble at Jeff's urging—it was mildly sweet.

"And this one is called the clitoria, and it is also very good for you," he said, flashing his 1000 megawatt smile, awaiting my response.

Of course I wondered if I heard him right—did he really just say clitoria flower, or was he putting me on? As it turns out, there really is a clitoria flower, officially known as the clitoria ternatea, also known as butterfly pea. When you see it, there is no question it was named after and clearly resembles a certain part of the female anatomy. To view photos or purchase one as they only grow in a few places in the United States, (they thrive in Florida), check out this website: www.davesgarden.com. The unique pure blue color makes it a hot commodity for specialty recipes needing a natural dye for the color blue, like blue cakes, and blue tinted rice. Worldwide there are fans of the clitoria flower itself, as many can't get one where they live, and are willing to pay top dollar to have one shipped to them, or will settle for a photo of it because of its unique beauty—I didn't know this when I was spreading sorbet on one and having it for lunch.

(see recipe on page 27)

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Getting Started with Edible Flowers

I don't recommend winging it. Use a real recipe from a pro you found on the web or in a cookbook. The key is to start simple, with fruit salads. Make melons and tomatoes the base; use sweet toppings like yogurt sorbet or raspberry vinaigrette, and choose flowers that taste good and aren't poisonous—your guests will appreciate this.

Want to know more about edible flowers?

To point you in the right direction, I've included some resources below to get you started, including the recipe for the salad featured in this story, and another one for lobster in case this whole edible flowers thing doesn't work out.

Bon Appetite!

Bonnie

Email Bonnie and view video clip of "Edible Flowers" at: www.insidefitness.com

More edible flower resources:

Paradise Farms: Organic Farmer for pesticide-free ingredients

Chef Jeff McGinnis gets all of his organic flowers, fruits and vegetables from a certified organic farm in Miami called Paradise Farms. You can reach the owner, farmer Gabriela Marewski at: www.paradisefarms.net. Gabriela Marewski grows all of her fruits, vegetables and flowers without pesticides and practices the spiritual art of bio dynamics on her farm, harvesting using the natural cycles of the moon. She is currently capturing the essence of the clitoria flower to release it as a bottled scent. Gabriela believes the clitoria flower represents the divine feminine power; she harvests it during the new moon, bottles it, and releases it when it is fully energized 15 days later during the full moon.

Resource Guide on Edible Plants: The Mixed Cornucopia of Plants

The ultimate resource guide about all plants, including the edible ones included in this story is a book by plant expert Stephen Sacciola called "The Mixed Cornucopia of Plants."

Try these recipes from Chef Jeff McGinnis

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Edible Flower Melon Salad w Yogurt Sorbet

8 each	Melon balls honey dew, cantaloupe and watermelon
1/8 piece	European cucumber sliced thin
8 each	Cherry tomatoes (organic)
Handful of...	Mixed organic edible flowers, nasturtiums, clitorias, calendulas
1 teaspoon of each	Lemon, Lime, Orange
1 tablespoon of	Extra virgin olive oil
Pinch of	Salt and Pepper

Mix all ingredients together and top with fat free yogurt sorbet (optional).
For the sorbet simply add 1 cup fat free yogurt and 2 cup simple syrup to the ice cream machine and spin until frozen.

Grilled Maine Lobster

Citrus endive, Vanilla hearts of palm, Tomatoes, Carrot ginger
1-1/2 lb Lobster
Blanched 7 minutes in boiling water then shock in ice water.
Cut in half and remove meat from claws, rub with olive oil salt and pepper
And simply grill in shell until hot. Serve over Endive Salad.

2 pieces	Belgium Endive
4 pieces	Hearts of Palm
10 each	Orange Segment
Juice of	2 carrots
Juice of	1 oz ginger
1	Vanilla bean
1/4 bunch	Mint
1/4 bunch	Parsley
1/4 cup	Olive oil

Sauté endive with olive oil medium heat, add orange Juice, vanilla, seasoning, and hearts of palm. Simmer 5 Minutes, then chill. Place endive and palm hearts on Plate and top with orange, tomatoes and olive oil. Finish with carrot ginger sauce. For the parsley and Mint oil simply puree mint, 1/4 cup oil, and parsley. Strain.